

WALL STREET JOURNAL

28 August 1985

ARTICLE APPEARED

ON PAGE 23

# Peruvian Peasants Suffer in Confrontation Between Government, Maoist Guerrillas

By EVERETT G. MARTIN

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

HUANTA, Peru — Every Sunday, Huanta's central plaza resounds with martial music and slapping feet as stern-faced high school students and troops from the local army garrison goose-step past local officials watching from the balconies of city hall.

Attendance, at least for Huanta's civilian officials, is definitely advisable. The military makes a point of staging this weekly reminder for everyone to be behind its campaign to stamp out the guerrilla menace.

For five years, this city of 20,000 nestled in a narrow valley of the Andes, has been caught in a murderous battle between the dogmatic Maoist guerrillas who call themselves the Sendero Luminoso ("Shining Path") and Peruvian army, marine and police units.

So Huanta shows its solidarity with the Sunday parades. And Indian communities farming the surrounding hill sides show theirs by joining self-defense groups organized by the military. These groups are supposed to resist the well-armed guerrillas by wielding kitchen knives, Andean sling-shots, and spears made of sharpened sticks.

## A Heavy Toll

Since the Sendero Luminoso surfaced, nearly 5,000 Peruvians have been killed in the government-guerrilla warfare, according to official figures that don't list the deaths of guerrillas, soldiers or civilians separately.

Two years ago, guerrilla activity in Huanta was the worst in Peru. Now, military sources say, most of the guerrillas have been driven out of their mountain stronghold and into the jungles beyond. Handling the terrorist threat is one of the key tasks confronting Peru's new president, Alan Garcia.

It's still a dirty war, and Huanta still is paying a high price. Local families and Indian farmers say they have relatives missing or dead, victims of the military or the guerrillas. Reports reached civilian officials in the last month of more than 50 peasants missing in the district.

According to Huanta Mayor Nelson Pereyra, their families claim they were seized as terrorist suspects by army patrols. One youth, he says, turned up dead with torture marks on his body.

Most of those seized were said to have been released after more than a week's de-

tention. But while they were held their despairing families hadn't any notification of who was holding them and where. This, Huanta officials say, violates regulations that security forces are supposed to follow even though they are the supreme authority in the military emergency zones declared in the 25 mountain provinces in southern and central Peru threatened by the guerrillas.

"It's evident that human rights are still being violated here," says Mayor Pereyra, a 43-year-old schoolteacher.

President Garcia has promised to keep pressure on the guerrillas—but without repressive measures. In his July 28 inaugural address, he warned that "the law will be applied with severity" against those who violate human rights as well as against terrorists. He has promised to appoint a commission to determine how to avoid future abuses, and he says he will step up development projects in the Huanta region, one of Peru's poorest.

Mayor Pereyra had hoped such problems were over after 49 badly mutilated

heavy losses at the hands of terrorists angry about their government ties.

## Guerrilla Raid

In Occochaca, up a rocky mountain road three miles south of Huanta, well-armed guerrillas raided the village in February and killed the head of the defense group while the others stood by helpless to resist with their primitive weapons. "They warned us," says a villager, "that if we continued to support the military, they would blow us up."

The guerrillas also warned them against voting in Peru's presidential elections, says the villager, who was afraid to give his name. Although caught between the terrorists and the security forces, he says, "We voted anyway, because we would have too much trouble with the government if we didn't."

On the next hilltop, isolated Runguyocc is another village caught in between. A year ago, several villagers were killed by marauding guerrillas for forming a defense force. But two weeks ago army patrols seized 20 of the self-defense force in three separate raids, says the village governor, Antonio Ccente Yaranga.

Dozens of Indian women wearing grimy fedoras and brightly colored skirts and petticoats stream down from their hillside plots to tell what happened. "They fired their guns into the air and forced us all to go into the chapel," says Felicitas Barrial Quispe, bursting into tears. "They accused those they arrested of being terrorists, but they are innocent."

## Ejected From Homes

The soldiers ordered the remaining villagers to sleep thereafter in Runguyocc's tiny adobe chapel. "They said that if we slept in our houses, they would slit our throats," a woman explains. "Only terrorists move at night, they said, so we must all be together in the chapel when they come again."

In Lima, the capital, an army spokesman says two of the detainees were members of Sendero's mass-support committee, and were turned over to the judiciary. The wife and child of one of them were being held "to protect them," and the other 16 were released, he asserts. "You can be sure that it was the population itself that denounced the infiltrators."

"People are missing," he concedes, "but it isn't in our interest to assassinate local authorities or innocent young people."

Continued



bodies were found a year ago in three mass graves near Huanta, all of them, it was later determined, the victims of the marine unit that was stationed in the town at the time. National outrage forced the marines to change the local commander, and the human-rights situation improved dramatically until the marines were replaced by an army unit a month ago.

Officials here are puzzled by the recent seizures. The "suspects," they note, were almost all Indian men and women, members of the government-organized self-defense groups. The groups have suffered

2.

The Senderos claim to be followers of the doctrines of Mao Tse-tung, and they disavow any connection with the present regimes in Moscow, Havana or Peking. Peruvian intelligence hasn't uncovered any evidence to indicate that they receive help from outside the country.

Their leader, Abimael Guzman, a 55-year-old former philosophy professor, has a following, the military spokesman says, of peasants who have gone to university and returned to their communities. At one time, the Senderos declared that they were setting up a Marxist state in the Andes that would spread out to swallow up the whole country, but their plan faltered when the government forced most of them to take sanctuary in the jungle.

Since then, isolated Sendero cells have shown up in other Andean provinces to the north and in Lima. Terrorist incidents throughout the country continue at a rate of about 200 a month.

About half the episodes are limited to painting slogans on walls; but in recent weeks, five car bombs have been set off in the capital, causing one injury. The guerrillas have shown that they can plunge Lima into darkness by bombing power transmission lines. Police also blame the guerrillas for a machine-gun attack on a bus stop that killed three naval technicians on their way to work in the capital two weeks ago.

"Peru isn't in danger of going up in flames," the military spokesman says, "if only we could capture their leaders." In the end, he says, "It isn't a question of achieving a military victory. Victory will come when we eliminate the economic and social causes."